NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 10024-0018

7

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Sohmer & Company Piano Factory

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 31-01 Vernon Boulevard [ ] not for publication

city or town Queens [ ] vicinity

state New York code NY county Queens code 081 zip code 11106

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements as set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [X] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [ ] nationally [ ] statewide [X] locally. ([ ] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Ruth A Pierpont DSHPO 12/23/13

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. ([ ] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

[X] entered in the National Register
[ ] see continuation sheet
[ ] determined eligible for the National Register
[ ] see continuation sheet
[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register
[ ] removed from the National Register
[ ] other (explain) _____

Signature of the Keeper date of action

Alexis Abernathy 2/14/14

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as apply)

[X] private
[ ] public-local
[ ] public-State
[ ] public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

[X] building(s)
[ ] district
[ ] site
[ ] structure
[ ] object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	**0**	**TOTAL**

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/ manufacturing facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/ multiple dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN/
Romanesque Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick and Concrete
walls Brick
roof Asphalt Shingle
other Copper, Wood, Sandstone

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

[X] **A** Property associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

[ ] **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

[X] **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

[ ] **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

[ ] **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

[ ] **B** removed from its original location

[ ] **C** a birthplace or grave

[ ] **D** a cemetery

[ ] **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure

[ ] **F** a commemorative property

[ ] **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance:
(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Industry

Period of Significance:

1886 - 1947

Significant Dates:

1886

Significant Person:

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

Berger & Baylies

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

[ ] preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
[ ] previously listed in the National Register
[ ] previously determined eligible by the National Register
[ ] designated a National Historic Landmark
[ ] recorded by historic American Building Survey
_____
[ ] recorded by Historic American Engineering Record
_____

Primary location of additional data:

[ ] State Historic Preservation Office
[ ] Other State agency
[ ] Federal Agency
[X] Local Government (NYC LPC)
[ ] University
[ ] Other repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .48 acres

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18	598464	4510756	3	18		
2	18			4	18		

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Erin Rulli

organization Higgins Quasebarth & Partners, LLC date 17 December 2013

street & number 11 Hanover Square, 16th Floor telephone 212.274.9468

city or town New York state NY zip code 10005

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items
(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner (Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name TTW Realty, LLC

street & number 18-50 Steinway Street telephone

city or town Astoria state NY zip code 11105

Narrative Description of Property

Located at the corner of Vernon Boulevard and 31st Avenue in Long Island City, Queens, the Sohmer & Co. Piano Factory is a monumental six-story factory building constructed in 1886, and designed by the New York architectural firm of Berger & Baylies. The building's mansard-roofed clock tower rises seven stories at the corner and is flanked by long, monumental brick facades that extend eighteen bays to the east and twenty five-bays to the south, making it one of the most prominent structures along the East River waterfront. Articulated by segmentally arched windows, stringcourses and corbelling, the expansive brick facades are a rich and varied composition, an exceptional example of the American industrial interpretation of the German Romanesque Revival style.

The six-story red brick factory building is situated on the northwest corner of a lot bound by Vernon Boulevard to the west, 31st Avenue to the north, 12th Street to the east, and 31st Drive to the south. L-shaped in plan, the building occupies the northwest corner of a lot that measures 192 feet along Vernon Boulevard, 198 feet along 31st Avenue and extends 217 feet to the south and 226 feet to the east. The Sohmer & Co. Piano factory is a prominent structure along the waterfront landscape; it looks directly onto the East River to the west and the Socrates Sculpture Park to the southwest. To the east of the building, medium-scale factory buildings are interspersed with recent high-rise construction. The Sohmer & Co. Piano Factory retains its integrity to a high degree. Modifications to the original windows and interior open factory floor plans occurred in the 1980s when ownership changed. Between 2007 and 2013 the building was converted to residential lofts on the upper floors with new penthouse additions at the roof. The exterior of the building was restored as part of the rehabilitation.

The building has two primary facades fronting Vernon Boulevard and 31st Avenue, both of which feature red brick laid in common bond with simple brick and sandstone details. The clock tower is three-bays wide on each of the street facades and rises to a copper-trimmed mansard roof. The building has a two-story base surmounted by four additional stories. Both the base and upper stories feature a regular pattern of segmentally arched window bays.

The Vernon Boulevard facade, (west elevation) is twenty-five bays wide and has a slight angle, which reflects the bend in the street. The first three bays are part of the clock tower and are framed by projecting corner pilasters. A pier between bays 13 and 14 delineates the twelve bay extension to the west facade, completed in c. 1906–07. The extension has continuous detailing to match the original section of the facade. The last two bays occupy the angled portion of the facade. Brick and sandstone sillcourses and stringcourses are located above the first and second stories. The brick and sandstone cornice marks the fifth story; while the sixth-story windows are topped by a simple corbelled brick parapet surmounted by sandstone coping.

The windows throughout are segmentally arched openings filled with new wood six-over-six double-hung windows. There are subtle variations in the sill and surround treatments on all stories. The first-story windows have projecting sandstone sills with brick quoin surrounds. The second-, fourth-, and fifth-story windows have projecting sandstone sills and simple header-brick lintels. A continuous sandstone sillcourse extends along the third- and fourth-story windows, which have simple header-brick lintels.

The five entries to the building on the Vernon Boulevard facade include four pedestrian entries—for the ground floor retail spaces – and the freight entrance. The original entrance at bays 12 and 13 is more elaborately detailed than the others and is composed of a shallow brick inset flanked by projecting piers and topped by stone blocks, which support a steel I-beam lintel decorated with rosettes. A non-historic hollow metal door occupies the entry. The other entries are

historic, but not original to the building. Located at bays 3, 4, and 14, they are detailed in a manner similar to that of the adjacent windows, with brick surrounds laid-up to imitate quoins; these openings are infilled with non-historic hollow metal doors. The service entry occupies the two southernmost bays and is filled with a metal roll-down gate.

The 31st Avenue façade (north elevation) is eighteen bays wide and continues the organization and language of the Vernon Boulevard facade. The principal building entrance is on this facade; it occupies bays 11 and 12 and is not original. It consists of paired glass doors flanked by sidelights and topped by a thin metal lintel. The entrance, like the adjacent windows, has a brick surround laid-up to imitate quoins. Two original cast-iron balconies are located at the second story, at bays 3 and 15. The balconies are supported by partially fluted columns and feature rosettes on the fascia of the balconies and decorative cast-iron posts between the railings. The balcony door openings are deeply inset, segmental bays with paneled reveals, paired and paneled wood and glass doors, segmental transoms, and header-brick lintels.

The clock tower is three bays wide on both street facades and acts as a strong vertical anchor at the corner of the building. The tower projects slightly from the adjoining facades and is framed at the corners by continuous pilasters. Brick gables rise above the pilasters at the mansard and are marked by restored, functioning clocks. The clocks consist of round masonry dials with bronze Roman numerals. They are set within a slightly recessed plane outlined by header bricks and have projecting brick hoods. Attached numerals, noting the construction date of the building, “1886,” are positioned below the clocks between the sixth-story windows. Additional original signage is found at the second story, where the historic street names, “Jamaica” and “Boulevard” are etched into sandstone blocks. At the mansard of the clock tower, rounded dormers with projecting copper sills and molded copper hoods project from the asphalt-singled roof. The copper ridge flashing emphasizes the curve of the mansard and leads to a flat, square copper-clad roof with a molded and bracketed cornice.

The south elevation is visible from Vernon Boulevard above the neighboring two-story building. This facade is red brick laid in a common bond and is three bays wide; the windows have been infilled with brick. A painted wall sign reads “OFFICE FURNITURE WHOLESALE”. The east elevation, which is visible from 31st Avenue, is four bays wide and includes a two-story brick extension that projects into the courtyard.

The courtyard elevations (east and south facing elevations) have irregular bay divisions marked by segmentally arched openings and projecting sandstone sills filled with wood six-over-six double-hung sash. Both elevations have stair and elevator shafts that rise up to rooftop bulkheads. Window openings in each of the shafts are infilled with brick. There are four sets of recently installed utilitarian steel balconies on the west courtyard elevation and two sets of the same balconies on the south courtyard elevation. They are the width of a single bay on the second through sixth stories. These bays are filled with non-historic glazed single leaf doors and arched transoms. A one-story brick extension, added as part of the rehabilitation, is located in the courtyard. A new simple metal awning extends along the south elevation of the wing, covering a walkway.

Two rooftop penthouses, added as part of the 2007 rehabilitation, are located above the sixth story. The additions are set back from the street facades and are clad in metal panels with a dark gray painted finish. The additions have sliding glass doors with sidelights leading to the terraces of the western and northern sections of the roof. The courtyard elevations of the penthouses are clad in the same material and feature regularly punched sliding windows. Mechanical units are concentrated in the areas of the elevator bulkheads and the far eastern corner of the roof of the north wing along 31st Avenue.

The building is load-bearing brick masonry with heavy timber, post-and-beam construction on the interior. Historically, the factory was organized with an open floor plan with elevators and stairs at the rear of each of the building's two wings. The interior floors are supported by wood joists and beams carried by a row of wood posts that extend through the center of each wing. In 1982 the building was converted for use as a showroom for office equipment and storage space, and the interior was fitted with contemporary office space with partitions and suspended ceilings. The 2007 rehabilitation converted the building for residential use, with public spaces on the ground floor and open loft apartments on the second-through-sixth floors. The historic heavy-timber structure remains, with most of the interior finishes dating to the recent rehabilitation.

On the interior, the building is organized by two wings, the 31st Avenue wing and the Vernon Boulevard wing. The primary building lobby is entered from 31st Avenue. Detailed with contemporary finishes, it is a long narrow space with terrazzo flooring that leads to one of the elevators, a fire stair, and the courtyard beyond. To the west of the lobby, along Vernon Boulevard, are commercial spaces. To the east of the lobby are utility rooms and tenant amenity areas. The original brick perimeter walls, historically exposed and painted, and original wood piers remain in these commercial spaces. The upper floors house residential lofts organized along a double-loaded corridor that links the stair and elevator cores. The historic brick walls and wood structure remains, with new gypsum wallboard. The apartments are open in plan and the wood posts and beams, although clad in sheetrock, remain visible in many of the units. Vertical circulation, including two elevators and two stairs, is provided in historic locations at the rear of each of the building's two wings. The stair and elevator towers remain in their original locations and walls within the stair wells are painted exposed brick.

Statement of Significance:

The Sohmer & Co. Piano Factory is significant under National Register Criterion A as the manufacturing and business headquarters of an important piano producer that was part of the growth of the American piano industry in nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and as an integral part of the late-nineteenth century industrial development of Long Island City. As New York became a center of piano manufacturing, Sohmer & Co., established itself as a leader in the industry, specializing in the production of "vertical" or upright pianos, which were most popular for domestic use. Founded in Manhattan in 1872 by Hugo Sohmer (1845-1931), the company grew from making four pianos per week in 1872 to 46 per week in the 1880s, becoming one of New York's major piano manufacturers. In the late nineteenth century, the fabrication of pianos and other musical instruments was one of New York City's top ten manufactured products. Sohmer & Co. established itself in Queens in 1886, shortly after the giant of the piano industry, Steinway, moved to Long Island City, where the rapidly industrializing Queen's waterfront provided easy shipping access and proximity to rail lines. Sohmer & Co. maintained its manufacturing headquarters on Vernon Boulevard in Queens until 1982, well beyond the decline of the industry.

The Sohmer & Co. Piano Factory is also significant under Criterion C as an exceptional example of the American industrial interpretation of the German Romanesque Revival style, or *Rundbogenstil*. The building's mansard-roofed clock tower with long, monumental brick facades punctuated by segmentally arched windows, characterize the American version of the style, which used arched windows, corbelling and decorative brickwork to bring variety to the facades. Completed in 1886, the building responded to functional needs of natural light and the concentration of production on a single site. Equally important was the role of the building in presenting a formal, handsome and visible advertisement for the product to viewers across the East River as well as those traveling along it. The prominent clock tower remains today a reflection of the increasing dominance that companies and the workday routine took on as everyday life of the industrial era was standardized. The Sohmer & Co. Piano Factory is one of the numerous warehouse and factory buildings designed by local architects, Berger and Baylies. A small, but active firm throughout Manhattan during the late nineteenth century, their buildings represent the popularity of the many revival styles of the period. The Sohmer & Co. Piano Factory is a notable example of their work and the factory buildings of its time.

The period of significance of the Sohmer & Company Piano Factory spans the use of the building by the piano manufacturer from the time of construction in 1886 until 1947, when, due to the lack of demand for pianos and the decreased need for production space, the company began leasing floors in the building for other uses.

Designated a New York City individual landmark in 2007, this statement of significance is excerpted directly from the Sohmer & Co Piano Factory designation report. (New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *The Sohmer & Co. Piano Factory* (LP-2172), prepared by Donald G. Presa (New York, 2007).

The Industrial Development of Long Island City/Astoria[1]

The Sohmer & Company Piano Factory is located in the northern part of Long Island City near Astoria on the East River waterfront of Queens. In 1870, Long Island City became an incorporated municipality,[2] the fourth within the current boundaries of New York City, after New York City itself, Brooklyn, and Williamsburgh. That year, the Steinway family began to acquire 400 acres of land on the East River at the present-day Steinway Street and laid out Steinway Village[3], which attracted many residents of German extraction. At about the same time, the German United Cabinet Workers bought four area farms and developed an area known as Germantown. Beginning in the 1870s, and continuing until the turn of the century, large oil refineries, lumber yards, and factories for asphalt, ceramic pipe, barrels, tin ware, and glass, as well as chemical and gas plants lined the shoreline from Hunter's Point to Astoria, replacing the area's earlier country estates and farms, creating jobs and the need for housing. These businesses took advantage of the docks along the shore and the area's growing network of railroad arteries.

Long Island City was incorporated into Queens County in the consolidation of the Greater City of New York in 1898. Afterwards, industrial development continued along the East River waterfront and in inland locations along the transportation lines. Residential and industrial development continued after the opening of the Queensborough Bridge in 1909 and the coming of passenger train and subway service in the 1910s through the 1930s. The area also gained importance in the fledgling movie industry with the opening of the Famous Players—Lasky Studios, later Paramount Studios, in 1919–21 (35–11 35th Avenue). The Triborough Bridge, connecting the neighborhood to the Bronx and the mainland, opened in 1936. By the Second World War, the Sohmer & Co. building had been joined by many other industrial and commercial buildings along Queen's East River waterfront.

The History of the American Piano Industry[4]

The piano was virtually unknown in the American colonies in 1771, when Thomas Jefferson asked his agent to have a "forte-piano" sent to him from Europe. By the 1780s, however, piano imports were being supplemented with domestically produced instruments made by a handful of manufacturers in New York and Philadelphia.[5] But despite the announcement in New York, in 1791, that one Mr. Kullin "would perform on a Grand Concert Pianoforte...just finished by Messrs. Dodds & Claus, of this city,"[6] American-made pianos were rare at the turn of the nineteenth century.

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[1] This section draws upon the following sources: Greater Astoria Historical Society, "The History of Astoria and Long Island City" (2006); Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), "Astoria Park Pool and Play Center" (LP-2196), prepared by Donald G. Presa (New York, 2006); ____, *Steinway Hall Designation Report* (LP-2100), prepared by Jay Shockley (2001); ____, "Survey Report – Long Island City, Queens," prepared by Dennis Pidgeon and Kate Frankel (1991 draft); Vincent Seyfried, "Astoria," *The Encyclopedia of New York City*. ed., Kenneth T. Jackson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 63; _____, "Long Island City," *Encyclopedia*, 690.

[2] Incorporating the villages of Ravenswood, Hunter's Point, Dutch Kills, and Astoria.

[3] Steinway Village grew to include row houses, a lumberyard/sawmill, a foundry, piano factory, and a piano case works.

[4] This section is based on: LPC, *Estey Piano Company Factory* (LP-2195), prepared by Michael D. Caratzas (New York, 2006), which draws upon the following sources: Alfred Dolge, *Pianos and Their Makers: A Comprehensive History of the Development of the Piano* (originally published 1911; reprinted New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 277; Arthur Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos: A Social History* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1954); Craig H. Roell, *The Piano in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Daniel Spillane, *History of the American Piano-Forte: Its Technical Development and the Trade* (Originally published 1890; reprinted New York: Da Capo Press, 1969); and *Trow's Business Directory of the Borough of Queens* (New York: Trow's Directory, Printing, and Bookbinding Co. 1902, 1906-07, 1912).

[5] John Jacob Astor was importing pianos into New York by 1786, according to *Men, Women and Pianos*, p.443.

[6] *Men, Women and Pianos*, p. 458.

According to one estimate made in the 1790s, only 27 families in the entire city of Boston owned pianos at that time, and all of those instruments had been made in London.

For the first half of the nineteenth century, Boston was "the liveliest American center for the development of new piano-making ideas," as its makers pioneered crucial technological advancements that included the one-piece iron frame.[7] But other cities were making pianos, too, and by 1829, with the industry on the rise, Philadelphia led the country in piano production, followed by New York, Boston, and Baltimore. By the 1840s and 1850s, with New York's ascendence as the nation's cultural and commercial capital, German piano makers began arriving in the city, including Heinrich E. Steinweg, whose name—later changed to Steinway—would become synonymous with the instrument.[8]

The 1850s "marked the domestic triumph of the American piano," as the nation's production doubled during the decade, and imports from England dwindled to virtually nothing.[9] Although the piano would never become, in the words of pianist and social historian Arthur Loesser, a "possession of the 'masses,'" its appearance in more and more American parlors led one popular writer to remark in 1867 that "almost every couple that sets up housekeeping on a respectable scale considers a piano only less indispensable than a kitchen range."[10] Between 1870 and 1910, and especially, in the latter two decades of this period, the American piano industry boomed; per-capita consumption of pianos skyrocketed, with one American in every 252 purchasing a new piano in 1910, up from one in 1,540 in 1870. Falling prices and the growing availability of inexpensive, low-quality "thump-boxes" were factors in expanding the market for the piano, which was becoming an increasingly affordable status symbol. Among this backdrop, Sohmer was founded and flourished into a major producer of the instrument.

In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, as the piano became a more common feature of the middle-class home, it began to carry considerable cultural freight. During this period and into the twentieth century, most piano players were women and girls; the ability to play even simple tunes on the instrument was a mark of a "cultivated lady" with good social graces, as piano music had become "an unavoidable feature of the small soiree."[11] The piano was believed to be more suitable for a girl than the harp—which might bring bad posture – or the horn, violin, or cello, which were inappropriate for refined, modest young women and were thought to cause "detriment of their feminine attractions."[12] But more importantly, the piano was viewed as an important feature of a home that was supposed to shelter its family from the uncertainties of an increasingly industrialized society, and to incubate moral and spiritual values that were believed to be under threat. Music was held to be morally uplifting "medicine for the soul";[13] a mother's duty to provide it to her family was intertwined with her responsibilities as keeper of the domestic hearth. The daughters of the house also shouldered this duty. By playing the piano at home, one 1909 article argued, a girl could "lighten the hours free from the cares of business and household," acting as "a boon to her father, to her mother, and to her brothers." In the words of historian Craig H. Roell,

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[7] *Men, Women and Pianos*, p. 462. The Babcock frame, which was a cast-iron, one-piece frame for square pianos, was developed in Boston and patented in 1825; the Boston manufacturer Jonas Chickering patented a one-piece iron frame for grand pianos in 1843. The iron frame was crucial in permitting the use of thicker, higher-tension strings, enabling a fuller sound.
[8] On the Steinway company, see LPC, *Steinway Hall Designation Report* (LP-2100) (New York: City of New York, 2001), prepared by Jay Shockley.
[9] *Men, Women and Pianos*, p. 509.
[10] *Men, Women and Pianos*, p. 540; James Parton, "The Piano in the United States," *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1867, p. 82, cited in The Piano in America, p. 23.
[11] *The Piano in America*, p. 24.
[12] *The Piano in America*, p. 15.
[13] *The Piano in America*, p. 5.

"The girl musician was not just cultivating a pastime or social grace; she was playing her proper role. She provided a musical oasis in a workday world."[14]

The peak year for domestic pianos was 1909, when American manufacturers turned out nearly 365,000 of them. Several factors had contributed to the industry's rapid growth over the previous four decades, including the rise of the supply business, which provided keys, actions, cases, soundboards, and other ready-made parts to manufacturers that were too small to produce these components themselves.[15] The widespread use of installment sales, broadened musical education, and sophisticated marketing techniques—including manufacturers' sponsorship of concerts and their construction of recital halls—also boosted sales. By the turn of the twentieth century, changes were afoot that foreshadowed the industry's collapse. Around that time, the industry started to consolidate; multiple brand names were grouped under big corporate umbrellas, diluting the value of old, respected marquees and squeezing out smaller manufacturers. The growth of the used-piano business undercut new piano sales. And while pedal-operated and electric player pianos boosted the industry between 1900 and 1925, manufacturers sowed the seeds of their own demise by emphasizing these instruments' ease of operation. "There is no question that for the industry as a whole, the appeal to the consumer's laziness was a very profitable, but eventually disastrous path," Roell explains, noting that Steinway, which continued to make high-quality pianos requiring skilled human hands, was among the strongest survivors of the fierce industry shakeout to come.[16]

The arrival of the phonograph around the turn of the twentieth century posed some threat to piano manufacturers, but radio devastated the industry. Not only did radios offer a wide variety of musical and other programming, but they were cheaper and smaller than pianos, came in attractive cabinets, and were seen as technological marvels. As radio production rose from 190,000 units in 1923 to almost five million in 1929, the piano industry experienced near-complete collapse. Between 1923 and 1933, the number of American piano manufacturers shrank from 160 to 36; the industry's workforce fell by 85%. Even the once-mighty American Piano Company, which became the first musical instrument manufacturer to be listed on the New York Stock Exchange following its 1908 formation, fell into receivership in 1929. Although Sohmer's business remained relatively strong during the mid-twentieth century, the company was leasing excess space in its Long Island City factory to other companies.

From the late nineteenth century on, piano manufacturer's growth in the Midwest—particularly in Chicago and Cincinnati—eroded the dominance in the industry that East Coast cities, particularly New York, Boston and Baltimore, once enjoyed. Nevertheless, New York remained a major center for piano making until the time of the industry's decline. In 1911, 120 of the 295 American piano manufacturers were headquartered in New York City, giving it, by a wide margin, the most manufacturers of any city in the United States;[17] in 1924, just before the piano industry fell apart, "American piano production had reached phenomenal proportions," and New York was "one of the leading domestic centers for the production of pianos and other musical instruments."[18] Although most of the city's piano manufacturing

[14] *The Piano in America*, p. 25.
[15] Loesser explains that, by the late nineteenth century, "the American piano-making industry had become, to a greater or lesser degree, an assembly of separately, independently made parts. As early as 1880 Steinway & Sons advertised in a trade paper that they were 'the only manufacturers who make every part of their pianofortes—including the casting of the full iron frames—in their manufactories.' They continued making this claim for decades; it was never challenged as long as it was made" (*Men, Women & Pianos*, p.525). Dolge wrote in 1911 that "perhaps no other class of manufacturing depends more largely upon auxiliary industries … than the piano industry" (*Pianos and Their Makers*, p. 115).
[16] *The Piano in America*, p. 160.
[17] These numbers were arrived at by the author using Alfred Dolge's list of American piano manufacturers, which appears on pp. 454-464 of *Pianos and Their Makers*. Dolge lists the city and state of each manufacturer's headquarters.
[18] *The Bronx and Its People: A History*, pp. 725, 727.

was occurring in the Bronx in the early twentieth century, Queens was well-represented by two of the largest piano manufacturers: Steinway & Sons and Sohmer & Co. Of these, only Steinway presently remains in operation.[19]

[19] In the early years of the twentieth century, there was about a dozen or so piano makers and dealers in the Queens, scattered around the borough with small concentrations in Long Island City/Astoria (including Steinway and Sohmer), Far Rockaway, and Flushing.

Berger & Baylies, Architects[20]

Bruno W. Berger (dates undetermined) first practiced as an architect in New York City with Theodore A. Tribit in the firm of Tribit & Berger from 1879 to 1880. In 1881, he practiced independently and in the following years joined in partnership with Franklin Baylies (dates undetermined), whose architectural career had just begun. The firm of Berger & Baylies designed commercial and residential structures in the city, including many warehouses and store and loft buildings now located in the [National Register-certified] Tribeca Historic Districts, many of which exhibit characteristics of the neo-Grec Style. The Sohmer & Company building was one of their major commissions, and unusual for the firm in that it was designed in the German Romanesque Revival style.

Berger & Baylies remained active until 1890, at which time both architects established independent practices. In 1904, Berger established the firm of Bruno W. Berger & Son, which was active at least through 1940, designing mainly residential and institutional buildings. Baylies's office remained active through 1929, designed mostly commercial structures, some of which are located in the [National Register-listed] SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District and in the [National Register-certified] Tribeca Historic Districts. He appears to also have designed Sohmer's addition in c. 1906–07.

Sohmer & Company, Piano Makers[21]

Sohmer & Co. was founded in 1872 by German immigrant Hugo Sohmer (1845-1931). Sohmer, who had apprenticed with several piano firms before establishing his own company, was the inventor of and the first to build a five-foot baby grand piano. However, the Sohmer firm came to specialize in making "verticals" or upright pianos that were more popular for domestic usage, and the company's product was one of the finest pianos made in the United States. Hugo Sohmer's first factory was located in Manhattan at 149 East 14th Street in New York's "Little Germany" and in the same building as the Academy of Music (demolished).[22] By 1879, the factory had expanded into the adjacent buildings at 151 to 155 East 14th Street at Irving Place. A few years later, the company had outgrown its 14th Street location, and moved its manufacturing facilities to a larger building at 143 East 23rd Street. By the 1880s, the company, which had grown from making four pianos per week in 1872 to 46 per week, was established as one of New York major piano makers. Business continued to increase, and in 1886, Sohmer bought a large tract of waterfront land near the Astoria ferry in Queens, where a new six-story factory with a prominent clock tower would be built.

Sohmer & Co. was part of the booming nineteenth-century New York City piano industry. The fabrication of pianos and other musical instruments was one of New York City's top ten manufactured products. In 1872, there were 171 piano manufacturers in New York City; now only Steinway remains. While Sohmer never achieved the celebrity of its more famous counterpart and Queens neighbor, with which it maintained a close informal association, Sohmer did have notable

[20] This section was adapted from LPC, *Tribeca West Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1713), Architects Appendix, 351 (New York, 1989), and includes the following sources: Dennis Steadman Francis, *Architects in Practice in New York City, 1840-1900* (New York, 1979), 14, 15; *Key to the Architects of Greater New York* (New York, 1900), 11; (1901), 13; LPC, Research Files; ___, *Ladies Mile Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1609), Architects' Appendix (New York, 1989); *Trow's New York City Directory* (New York, 1879-1921); and James Ward, *Architects in Practice in New York City, 1900-1940* (New York, 1989), 6, 7.

[21] The section draws upon the following sources: *Brooklyn Eagle* (July 31, 1886), 4; Christopher Gray, "The Sohmer Piano Factory," *New York Times* (Oct. 28, 1990), R8; *New York Times* (Jan 1, 1886), 4; (July 11, 1909), 8; (Nov. 18, 1923), RE2; (Jan. 11, 1952), 36; (May 27,1982), D5; "The Sohmer Story," (accessed online at www.pianopiano.com/sohmerstory.html); and *Trow's New York City Directory* (New York: Trow's Directory, Printing, and Bookbinding Co., 1874, 1881-82, 1884-85, 1895-96, 1905-06.)

[22] According to *Trow's New York City Directory*, Sohmer & Co. were the manufacturers of "patent agraffe pianofortes."

fans. Composer Victor Herbert owned several Sohmer pianos and the noted American songwriter Irving Berlin had three Sohmers with transposing keyboards that he used to write his music. In 1924, William Thompson Bonner wrote: "the firm Sohmer & Company, founded in 1872, makes pianos at Astoria, Long Island, that have long been special favorites with New York music lovers."[23] The firm also made custom-built pianos in the Art Deco and Spanish styles for film stars such as Ramon Navarro, Jean Harlow, and Al Jolson.[24] Before any Sohmer left the Queens factory, members of the Sohmer family personally inspected it and certified its approval.

Sohmer's business continued to expand in the early twentieth century, and in 1906-07, the company built a six-story addition to the Long Island City factory, apparently designed by Franklin Baylies, a member of the firm that designed the original building in c. 1886. In 1919, Sohmer & Company built a six-story piano showroom and office building at 31 West 57th Street, designed by architect Randolph Amiroty.[25] By this time, West 57th Street had become "piano row," with several other piano showrooms located there, including those of Steinway & Sons, Story & Clark, and Chickering & Sons. Sohmer sold it West 57th Street building to investors in 1952, but continued to lease part of it as a showroom for many years.

The Sohmer Brothers sold the company in 1982 to Pratt, Read & Co., which continued to make fine-crafted pianos under the Sohmer name; by the early 2000s, Sohmer pianos were being made in Korea by the SMC Company, which is the largest piano maker in the world and the producer of other fine pianos, such as Bechstein, William Knabe, Conover Cable, and Hazelton pianos.

The Sohmer & Company Piano Factory Building[26]

The original c.1886 portion of the Sohmer & Co. Piano Factory Building, with its mansard clock tower, exhibits many characteristic features of a late-nineteenth-century factory. Like other industrial buildings of its time, much of the Sohmer factory's appearance and form is rooted in practical needs;"the aesthetic basis of American industrial building design," according to architectural historian Betsy Hunter Bradley, "was an ideal of beauty based on function, utility, and process."[27] Among the Sohmer building's features are its relatively narrow width and its L-shaped footprint, which arose from functional requirements; in industrial buildings, before the advent of artificial lighting, the need to bring ample natural light to the interior dictated a narrow width which, in turn, led the typical factory to take to form of an I, or of an amalgamation of wings in the shape of an L, U, H, or E.[28] The Sohmer building's flat roof, similarly, was a practical feature that was characteristic of the era's industrial buildings. Gabled roofs had largely been supplanted by flat roofs on

[23] William Thompson Bonner, *New York, The World's Metropolis* (New York: R.L. Polk & Co., 1924), 531, 640.
[24] *New York Times* (Aug. 13, 1982), B1.
[25] The company's earlier showrooms were located at 149 East 14th Street (demolished), 382 Second Avenue at 22nd Street (demolished), 170 Fifth Avenue, and 315 Fifth Avenue. The Sohmer Building at 170 Fifth Avenue, located in the New York City Ladies Mile Historic District, was designed by the noted commercial architect Robert Maynicke and built in 1897-98 in the Beaux Arts style.
[26] This section draws upon the following sources: Betsy Hunter Bradley, *The Works: The Industrial Architecture of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) and William H. Pierson, Jr., *American Buildings and Their Architects: Technology and the Picturesque; the Corporate and Early Gothic Styles* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1980), pp. 22-90, and has been adapted from LPC, *Estey Piano Company Factory* (LP-2195).
[27] *The Works*, p. 202.
[28] In some cases, the factory took the form of a K, as at the Joseph Loth & Company Silk Ribbon Mill (Hugo Kafka, 1885-86), which is a designated New York City Landmark. See LPC, *Joseph Loth & Company Silk Ribbon Mill* (LP-1860) (New York: City of New York, 1993), prepared by Betsy Bradley.

factories by the 1860s, as architects and other designers of industrial lofts sought to eliminate attic spaces within which dust might accumulate and spark fires.[29]

Many features, while rooted in function, also played an aesthetic role. While the original Sohmer Factory's footprint was chosen primarily for utilitarian purposes, it also enabled the building to maintain the street wall and shield its interior yard from public view, both of which were important to factory owners who wanted their buildings—their companies' "public facades"—to exhibit a neat appearance.[30] The Sohmer Factory's regular pattern of window openings allowed for even interior illumination but, as on other industrial lofts, also provided "a sense of organization and, by extrapolation, dignity for the exterior."[31] Brick was chosen for the factory's walls and facades because it was among the most fire-resistant materials then available. Berger & Baylies, like other designers of industrial buildings, used decorative brickwork – including, at Sohmer, stringcourses and corbels – as a "relatively economical means of relieving plain brickwork."[32] This technique was also seen on residential buildings that were contemporary to the original Sohmer Factory, particularly on large multiple dwellings with similarly expansive facades.

Sohmer's regular fenestration pattern and long, monumental brick facades projected a strong, solid, and attractive image for the company. This was important in an era in which a factory often served as an advertisement for its firm; companies typically produced bird's-eye renderings of their industrial complexes that appeared in their catalogs, in business directories, in advertisements, and on company letterhead.[33] Generally, these depicted the factory as a hub of activity with smoke pouring from its chimneys, the home of a successful business that, by implication, made a desirable and dependable product. An illustration published in 1887 in *Puck* magazine shows a large drawing of the factory and lumber yard just following completion; the drawing shows both street facades emphasizing Vernon Boulevard.

In erecting a factory that would use its monumental and attractive design to help market its products, the Sohmer Piano Company took advantage of the building's prominent site and its ability to be seen from long distances. It is clearly visible from across the East River; it seems likely that the Sohmers would have expected their factory to be seen by residents of Manhattan's east side and by passengers on boats on the East River,[34] and responded with a building that was sure to be an eye-catching landmark at this key location.

To make the most of the factory's location—and to get the most marketing value out of it—the Sohmer Piano Company and its architects endowed the building with an attention-grabbing clock tower that remains its signature feature. It was not unusual for large buildings in New York to have noteworthy corner features like the Sohmer tower; these buildings' opposite corners were the only places from which pedestrians could take them in their entirety, and early photographs of the Sohmer Factory make it clear that that angle, from which the building's symmetricality and large scale were apparent, was the one, above all others, from which it was meant to be seen. According to Bradley, architects tended to practice "rationalized placement of ornament" in designing factory buildings, considering decoration to be most appropriate for

[29] On this point, in addition to *The Works*, p. 179, see Brigitte Cook, "Preserving Design Objectives Found in Industrial Architecture of Mott Haven" (Unpublished Columbia University class paper, c.2004), p. 3.
[30] *The Works*, p. 60.
[31] *The Works*, p. 162.
[32] *The Works*, p. 234.
[33] For example, *King's Handbook of New York City* (Boston: Moses King, 1893) contained a large section, spanning pp. 913-984, devoted to "notable manufacturers" that included many illustrations of factory complexes.
[34] *New York Times* (March 20, 1887), 9.

entrances, towers, and other prominent features;[35] the Sohmer Factory's clock tower projects above the adjacent roof parapets and is topped by a bulbous mansard roof, which is its most elaborately-ornamented feature.

The American factory clock tower had its roots in the cupola of the early-nineteenth-century New England mill. The cupola marked the factory, like the meetinghouse, as a structure of local importance; it similarly contained a bell, which played a crucial role in organizing people's daily activities. As historian William H. Pierson, Jr. explains, no architectural feature "was more expressive of the role that each building played in the life of the community than the bell which in the meetinghouse called the congregation to worship and in the factory called the workers to their tasks."[36] By the 1830s, these cupolas were often placed atop towers that were attached to their buildings' facades; by providing exterior staircases, the towers prevented fires from spreading vertically through the interior of the building, while keeping the factory floor open for workers and machinery. The exterior tower, which would come to house water tanks, sprinkler systems, and other equipment, "would become standard in the fully developed nineteenth-century factory,"[37] but it played more than a functional role; towers and cupolas, like those of Boston's massive Chickering & Sons Piano Forte Works—which, upon its 1853 completion, was the country's largest industrial building—"provided a civic presence that coincided with the mill's dominant role in a new industrial order."[38] By the 1870s, the corner clock tower would become a feature of industrial complexes such as the large Manhattan works of R. Hoe & Company.[39]

By the late nineteenth century, the clock was influencing the day-to-day activities of New Yorkers as it never had before.[40] Americans were becoming "increasingly attentive to and accountable for living and working in synchronized ways," according to historian Carlene E. Stephens, and developments like the 1883 creation of time zones with the institution of Standard Time indicated that they were doing so.[41] But the inexpensive watch had yet to arrive, so most Americans depended on a patchwork system of time balls, factory whistles and bells, and timepieces displayed in the windows of jewelry stores to stay on schedule.[42]

They also depended on the publicly visible clocks that proliferated after the Civil War on the facades and towers of factories, commercial buildings, banks, railroad stations, courthouses, and schools.[43] These clocks, some publicly owned

[35] *The Works*, p. 232.
[36] *American Buildings and Their Architects*, pp. 43-44.
[37] *American Buildings and Their Architects*, p. 61.
[38] *Men, Women and Pianos*, pp. 495-496; *The Works*, p. 119. The Kohler & Campbell piano factory in the Bronx at East 163rd Street between Melrose and Courtland Avenues (Charles Steinmetz & C.S. Clark, 1885-1908, demolished) also featured a clock tower. See LPC, Bronx Survey (New York: City of New York, 1978), pp. 85-86. The Estey Piano Factory, also in the Bronx, also has a clock tower and is a designated New York City Landmark.
[39] An illustration of the Hoe factory appears on p. 67 of *The Works*.
[40] In 1854, the *New York Daily Times* lamented the inaccuracy of the City Hall clock, writing of the "shame that a city like ours, the great center of commerce, the metropolis of our great and growing country, should be without a decent clock to regulate its movements" ("The City Hall Clock – Necessity of a Better Time-Keeper," *New York Daily Times*, March 15, 1854, p. 2).
[41] Carlene E. Stephens, *On Time: How America has Learned to Live by the Clock* (Boston: Bulfinch, 2002), 109.
[42] One of America's best-known time balls was the one that dropped at noon between 1877 and 1914 from the roof of Western Union's New York City headquarters. Like other time balls around the country, it was activated by a daily signal telegraphed from Washington, D.C.; onlookers would use the time ball to synchronize their watches. See *On Time*, p. 117. Incidentally, time balls likely inspired one of New York City's most beloved and famous traditions—the annual lowering of a flagpole-mounted ball atop the old New York Times tower to mark the arrival of the new year. The basis for the New Year's ball "was probably the gold-plated 'time balls' that were once lowered at noon every day in seaports throughout the world to enable ships' navigators to set their chronometers," according to Tama Starr and Edward Hayman, *Signs and Wonders: The Spectacular Marketing of America* (New York: Currency/Doubleday 1998), p.267. The inexpensive "dollar watch," which dramatically expanded watch ownership, did not become available until 1896, according to On Time, p. 135.
[43] On this topic, see Alexis McCrossen, "Hands and Faces: Public Clocks in the United States After the Civil War" (accessed online at epsilon3.georgetown.edu/~coventrm/asa2001/panel9/mccrossen.html). Public clocks had appeared on American churches and meetinghouses by the

and some private, provided a valued service; the dedication of a new town clock could be cause for celebration with "music and cannon," and the failure of a clock that the public relied upon could inconvenience people in myriad, unexpected ways.[44] More than this, these clocks symbolized "regularity, coordination, order, permanence, and reverence for the machine," according to historian Alexis McCrossen, who says that they were "at the heart of modernity and the modern nation state." Companies that erected clocks for public use "reassured the public that [they] were regular, dependable, and punctual," asserting their importance within the public sphere;[45] they also often used their clocks for direct marketing advantage. In 1880, for example, when the Washington Post installed a new public clock at its headquarters, it crowed on its front page about making its building "useful as well as ornamental," affording "the Post another opportunity of serving the public." By the early twentieth century, clock makers marketed their products with the promise that they would attract the public's attention—that they would be visible "from more than one thousand doors and windows"—and public clocks did become important local landmarks that were closely associated with the companies that owned and maintained them.[46] It seems likely that the clock tower of the Sohmer Piano Factory was intended to brand its company as an important, publicly minded member of its community.

The Sohmer & Co. Piano Factory Building is an excellent example of the American industrial interpretation of the German Renaissance Revival or Rundbogenstil, which developed in the 1830s and 1840s, "synthesized classical and medieval architecture—particularly the round-arched elements of those styles—and relied on brick and locally available stone," according to Bradley.[47] Despite its name, buildings constructed in the American version of the style, like the Sohmer Factory, often used economical segmental-headed window openings. They also utilized corbelling, patterning, and other forms of decorative brickwork, to model and bring variety to their facades, and had parapets that sometimes varied in height and featured pediments, bringing additional visual interest. The design of the c.1906-07 addition to the original Sohmer building, which continues Berger & Baylies' c.1886 German Renaissance Revival style, is attributed to firm member Franklin Baylies. The Department of Buildings records for the addition have been lost, but the similarity of the addition to the original building, plus the fact the Baylies continued on his own to specialize in warehouse and loft buildings, while Berger's subsequent work was mainly residential, suggests that Baylies, who was also a Queens resident, may have been retained again by the Sohmers to execute the addition. Furthermore, Baylies's 1902 addition to an existing loft building at 155-159 Franklin Street (1882, George W. DaCunha) in the Tribeca West Historic District in Manhattan was designed in the same neo-Grec style as the original wing, indicating Baylies' apparent sensitivity to original designs when producing plans for building extensions.

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early eighteenth century, according to Frederick Shelley, *Early American Tower Clocks* (Columbia, Penn.: National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors, 1999), pp. ix-xv.

[44] 41 "Happy Chicopee: With Music and Cannon She Celebrates, and Looks with Delight at Her New Clock," *Boston Daily Globe*, September 24, 1887, p. 4. When a privately maintained clock used by the public on Chicago's North Side stopped working in 1893, it affected everything from the business of a local dentist, to the work of a housewife who "[couldn't] tell when to cook dinner," according to "Clock to Run Again: Yerkes' North Side Timepiece Undergoing Repairs," *Chicago Tribune*, November 27, 1893, p. 7.

[45] "Hands and Faces: Public Clocks in the United States After the Civil War."

[46] "The Post's New Clock: Our Building Made Useful to the Public as well as Ornamental," *Washington Post*, October 24, 1880, p. 1. The "from more than one thousand doors and windows" quote is from "Hands and Faces: Public Clocks in the United States After the Civil War." One newspaper account from 1901 described how an argument over the correct time led a group of men on a hansom cab ride around Manhattan as they sought out, by name, the Western Union time ball, the clocks of the Tiffany, Hudnut, and New York Life Insurance companies, and the clocks of the *Times and Tribune* ("What Time Is It?" 12, *New York Times*, July 7, 1901, p. SM3). For decades after watch ownership first became common, people continued to rely on public clocks. When Trinity Church's clock was stopped for repairs in 1947, it confused the "tens of thousands of 'Street' employees who several times a day turn their eyes to the gilded hands of the clock's … dials," according to "Time Stands Still in Trinity's Clock," *New York Times*, February 27, 1947, p. 23.

[47] *The Works*, p. 235.

The Sohmer & Co. Piano Factory Building not only showcases many representative features of a factory building of its time, but exhibits an elegant handling of these features, many of which, like the corner clock tower, are unusually distinctive. Altered only slightly since 1913, the Sohmer Piano Company Factory remains remarkably intact.

Subsequent History[48]

Sohmer & Co. continued to thrive in the early twentieth century; by 1915, it was employing 250 people. By 1947, Sohmer had excess capacity at its Vernon Boulevard plant, and was leasing portions of it to other companies. Sohmer remained at the Vernon Boulevard plant until 1982, when company was acquired by the Pratt, Read & Co.,[49] the leading American manufacturer of piano keyboards, which moved the factory to Ivoryton, Connecticut. The Sohmer building was then taken over by the Adirondack Chair Company, which specializes in office and institutional furniture. The company was founded in 1926. The Sohmer & Co. Archives now reside at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission designated the building as an individual landmark in 2007. Between 2007 and 2013 the building was rehabilitated and converted for residential use.

[48] This section includes the following sources: Chamber of Commerce of the Borough of Queens, *Queensborough, The Borough of Homes and Industry* (New York, 1915), 28; New York Times (Oct. 16, 1947), 48.

[49] Pratt-Read is one of the nation's oldest companies, dating back to Colonial times, when it made ivory combs and brushes; later, the company began producing piano keys and other components. *New York Times* (Aug. 13, 1982), B1.

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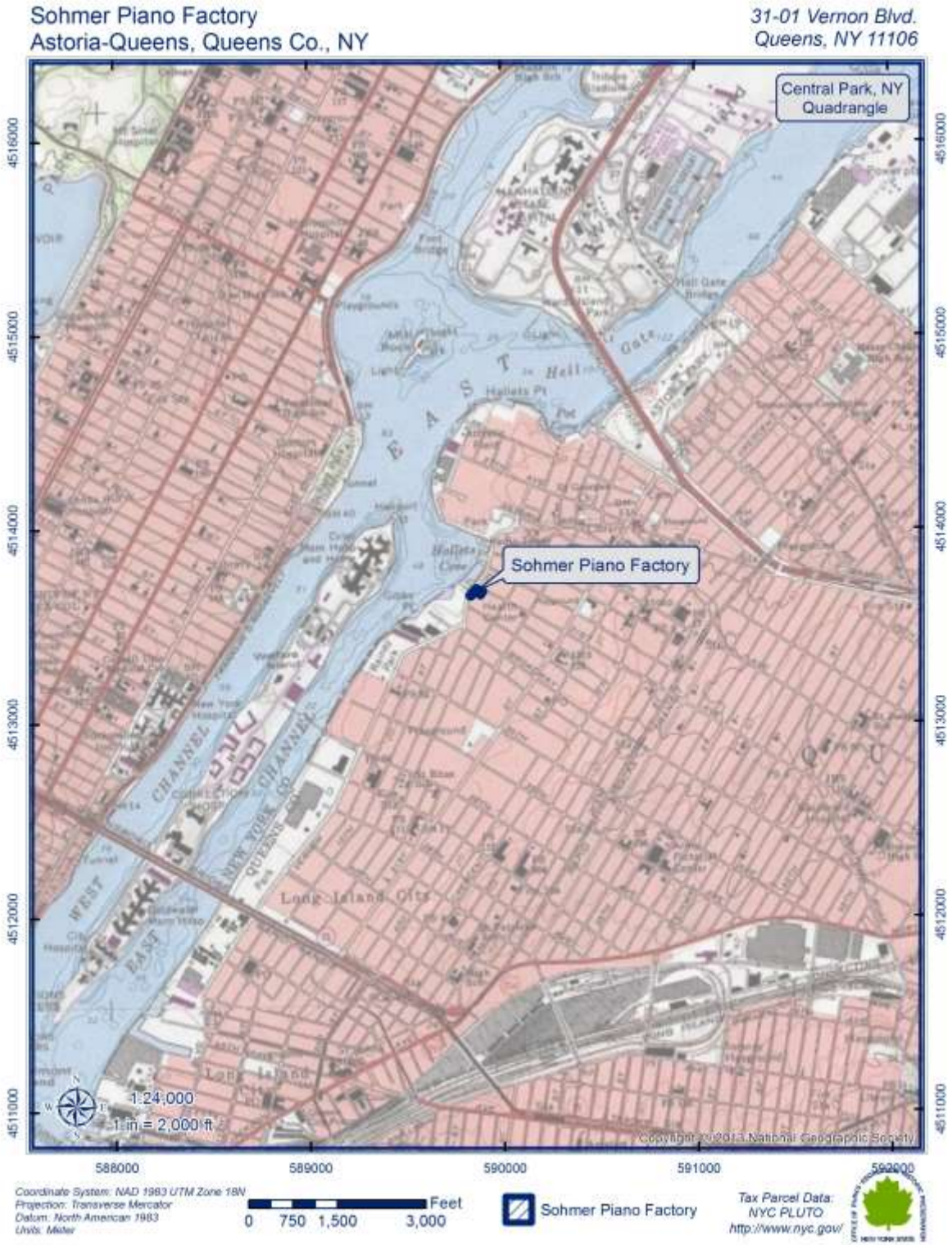
1906-07, 1912.

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of this nomination includes the entire lot, as outlined on the accompanying 2012 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map and is further indicated by the heavy line on the attached mapping.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire lot on Vernon Boulevard and 31st Avenue on which the original building was erected.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31-01 Vernon Blvd.
Queens, NY 11106
Central Park, NY
Quadrangle
Sohmer Piano Factory
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4515000
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1 in = 2,000 ft
Copyright © 2013 National Geographic Society
Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter
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Sohmer Piano Factory
Tax Parcel Data:
NYC PLUTO
http://www.nyc.gov/


Sohmer Piano Factory
Astoria-Queens, Queens Co., NY
31-01 Vernon Blvd.
Queens, NY 11106
∑ = .48 Acres
589864E 4513675N
Vernon Blvd
30th Dr
31st Ave
12th St
31st Dr
Broadway
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11th St
33rd Ave
14th St
1:2,000
1 in = 167 ft
Sources: Esri, DeLorme, NAVTEQ, USGS, Intermap, IPC, NRCAN, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), Esri (Thailand), TomTom, 2013
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Datum: North American 1983
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Sohmer Piano Factory
Tax Parcel Data:
NYC PLUTO
http://www.nyc.gov/

Photo List

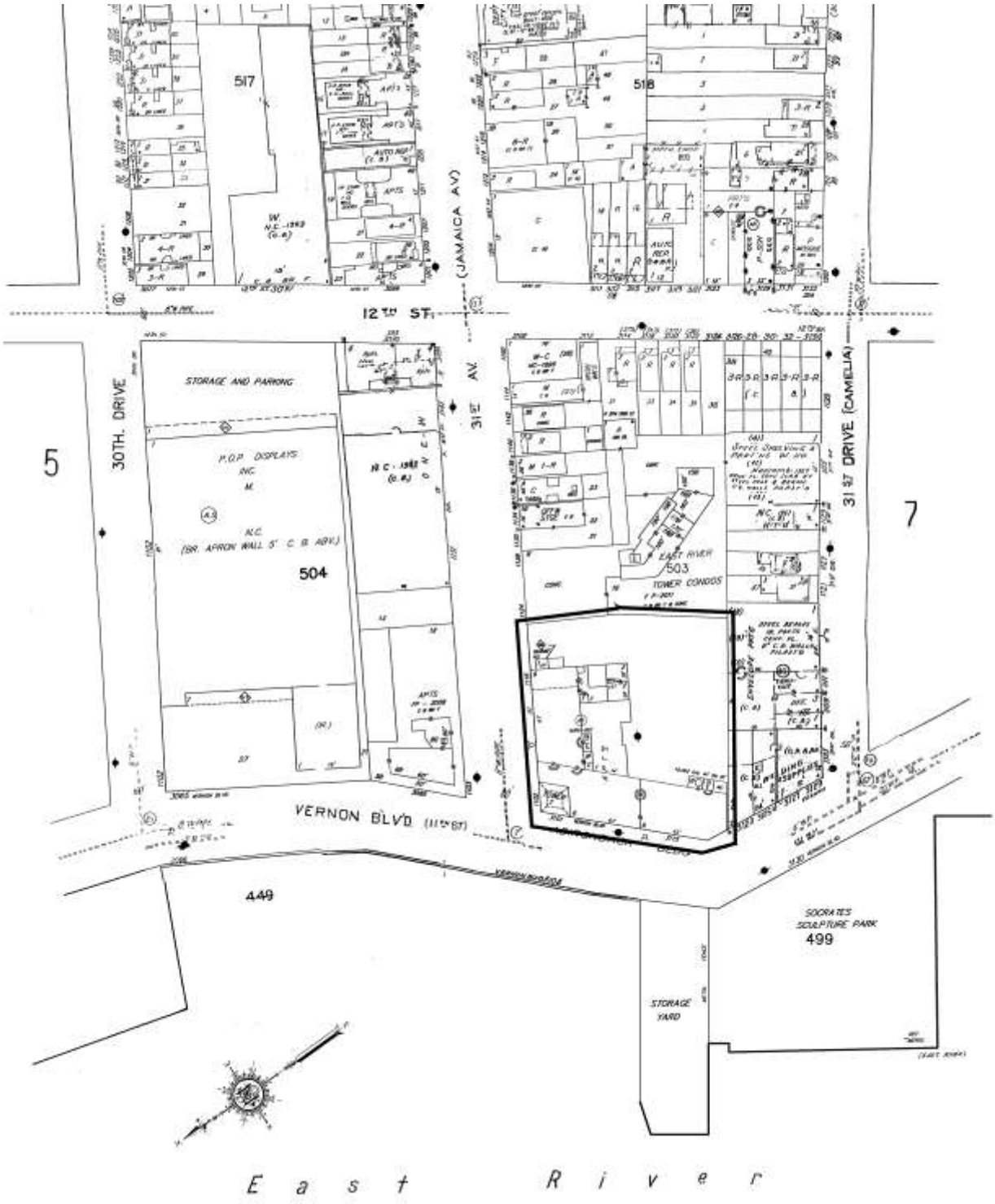
Sohmer & Co. Piano Factory
31-01 Vernon Boulevard
Queens County
NY
Photos by Jørgen Cleeman, Higgins Quasebarth & Partners, LLC
May & July 2013
Original digital files held at Higgins Quasebarth & Partners, 11 Hanover Square, NY, NY 10005
10 Photographs

Photo #1
Overall view looking southeast showing the clock tower at center, 31st Avenue façade to the left and Vernon Boulevard to the right
Photo #2
Vernon Boulevard façade, view looking to the northeast
Photo #3
Detail view of the Vernon Boulevard façade
Photo #4
Detail view of the clock tower
Photo #5
Façade and window detail on the Vernon Boulevard elevation
Photo #6
Cast-iron balconies at 2nd story, 31st Avenue
Photo #7
Ground floor corridor along 31st Avenue
Photo #8
Typical ground floor interior spaces
Photo #9
Typical loft apartment
Photo #10
Typical loft apartment interior

1. Illustration of the Sohmer & Co. Piano Factory published in *Puck* (magazine) in 1887

SOHMER PIANO CO., LONG ISLAND CITY (ASTORIA).

2. Sohmer & Co. Piano Factory, undated historical view (Greater Astoria Historical Society)



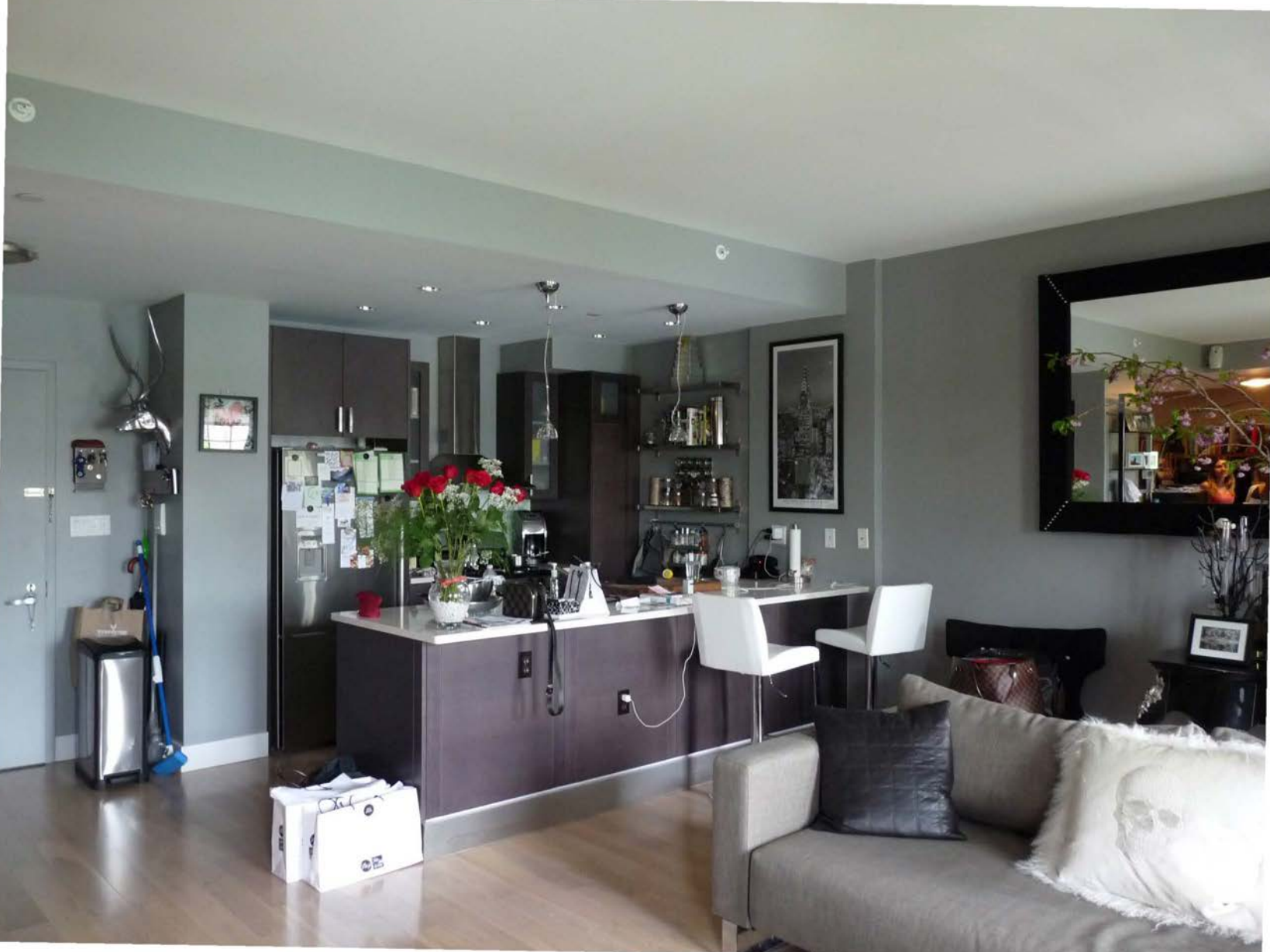
Sohmer & Company Piano Factory
31-01 Vernon Boulevard, Queens Co., NY

2012 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map
Queens County, NY Vol. 2 Plate 6
Nomination boundary indicated by dark line


1885
1886


FURNITURE
WHOLESALE


1886
1886



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Sohmer and Company Piano Factory

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NEW YORK, Queens

DATE RECEIVED: 12/30/13 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 1/21/14
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 2/05/14 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 2/15/14
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 14000007

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL:	N	DATA PROBLEM:	N	LANDSCAPE:	N	LESS THAN 50 YEARS:	N
OTHER:	N	PDIL:	N	PERIOD:	N	PROGRAM UNAPPROVED:	N
REQUEST:	Y	SAMPLE:	N	SLR DRAFT:	N	NATIONAL:	N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

X ACCEPT ___RETURN ___REJECT 2/14/14 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

A excellent example of piano manufacturing in Queens. Piano manufacturing became an important manufacturing industry in the New York area in the late 19th early 20th C and Sohmer was an important part

RECOM./CRITERIA A+C

REVIEWER_____ DISCIPLINE_____

TELEPHONE_____ DATE_____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.

Landmarks Preservation Commission

Robert B. Tierney
Chair

Kate Daly
Executive Director
kdaly@lpc.nyc.gov

1 Centre Street
9th Floor North
New York, NY 10007

212 669 7926 tel
212 669 7797 fax

October 23, 2012

Ms. Ruth Pierpont, Deputy Commissioner
New York State Office of Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation
P.O. Box 189
Peebles Island
Waterford, NY 12188-0189

Re: *Sohmer Piano Factory, Queens, New York*

Dear Ms. Pierpont:

I write on behalf of Chair Robert B. Tierney in response to your request for comment on the eligibility of the Sohmer Piano Factory, located at 31-01 Vernon Boulevard in Queens, for the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

The Commission strongly supports the nomination of the Sohmer Piano Factory. On February 27, 2007, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission voted to designate this factory building as an individual New York City landmark. The building was designed by the architectural firm Berger & Baylies, and is one of the most prominent structures along the Queens side of the East River in Long Island City.

Therefore, based on the Commission's prior review and designation of this factory building, the Commission has determined that the Sohmer Piano Factory appears to meet the criteria for inclusion on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kate Daly

cc: Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Mary Beth Betts, Director of Research

Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor

Rose Harvey
Commissioner

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Division for Historic Preservation
P.O. Box 189, Waterford, New York 12188-0189
518-237-8643

23 December 2013

Alexis Abernathy
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
1201 Eye St. NW, 8th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20005

Re: National Register Nominations

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to enclose nine National Register nominations, all on discs, to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

Troy Waste Manufacturing Company Building, Rensselaer County
Van Zandt, Jacobs and Co. Collar and Cuff Factory, Rensselaer
The Courier Building, Syracuse, Onondaga County
Sohmer and Company Piano factory Company, Erie County
Florendin Feasel House, Monroe County
John Lesee House, Jefferson County
Houk Manufacturing Company, Erie County
Building at 44 Central Avenue, Albany County
Albany Felt Company complex, Albany County

I am also enclosing a new disc of photos for the Kismet Temple, Kings County, as per your request. Please feel free to call me at 518.237.8643 x 3261 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank

Kathleen LaFrank
National Register Coordinator
New York State Historic Preservation Office

THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

MARGARET MARKEY
Assemblywoman 30th District
Room 712
Legislative office Building
Albany, New York 12248
(518) 455-4755

55-19 69th Street
Maspeth, New York 11378
(718) 651-3185

CHAIR
Tourisms, Parks, Arts and
Sports Development

COMMITTEES
Ways & Means
Governmental Operations
Labor
Racing & Wagering

January 22, 2014

Rose Harvey, Commissioner
NYS Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
Agency Building 1, 20th Floor
Empire State Plaza
Albany, New York 12238

Dear Commissioner Harvey:

As the Chair of the Assembly Standing Committee on Tourism, Parks, Arts and Sports Development, I strongly support placing the Sohmer & Company Piano Factory Building on the Register of Historic Places.

Sincerely,

Margaret Markey

Margaret Markey
Member of Assembly
Chair, Assembly Standing Committee on
Tourism, Parks, Arts and Sports Development